



January 28, 2025

“When an alien resides with you in your land, you shall not oppress the alien. The alien who resides with you shall be to you as the native-born among you; you shall love the alien as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God” (Leviticus 19:33-34).

Dear church,

I write to you today with grave concern. Over the past few days, ELCA leaders and ministry partners have shared with me the immediate impacts of recent executive orders focused on immigration. I have heard about families frightened of being torn apart and from congregations fearful that their churches can no longer offer safety or support to their immigrant neighbors. I have heard from faith partners ordered to stop services to refugees and from businesses upended by workforce disruptions.

Many of us in the ELCA come from immigrant peoples. As Lutherans, we have a long tradition of hospitality, dating back to the end of World War II, of helping displaced Lutheran refugees, assisting subsequent refugee groups and welcoming new immigrants. Our church has long called for compassionate, just and wise immigration reform. ("Toward Compassionate, Just and Wise Immigration Reform" social policy resolution).

Today, recent immigrants, refugees, asylum-seekers and displaced people are members of our congregations, communities and leadership. The presence of newcomers heightens our awareness of issues of relevance to the church so we can take part in faithful deliberation on public policies, like the ones that have come out in recent days. Our church's grave concerns grow out of these experiences with the people being affected.

From these experiences, people in our church have learned that the decision to leave one's home country is not made lightly. Many have arrived fleeing persecution because of how they worship, their political views, or their race and nationality. Political instability, environmental catastrophes and lack of opportunities have also compelled many to seek a more dignified life. Out of our own Lutheran experience of knowing many refugees, we have long stood against exclusionary attitudes and policies toward successive newcomers.

Among the policy changes to which our church's social teaching objects include:

- Orders to suspend all refugee resettlement.
- New and sweeping enforcement priorities.
- The summons of military personnel to the border.
- The decision to revoke special guidance regarding enforcement activity at or near sacred or protected places.

Keeping communities safe and supporting the well-being of all people is a goal shared by the ELCA. Yet it's worth naming that these executive actions are increasing fear and division within our society. Some

people, including U.S. citizens, are alarmed about immigration enforcement at churches, schools and playgrounds. Some are afraid to seek care at hospitals or to access essential services.

The ELCA supports the view that nations have the responsibility to protect their borders and safeguard their communities. However, these policies must cause “neither undue repercussions within immigrant communities nor bias against them” (“Immigration” social message, page 7). Just policies include recognition of the humanity of immigrants without status, respect for the dignity of those at the border and refuge for displaced people.

The Scriptures are clear. We are called to see anew the image of God in our immigrant neighbors. Following God’s call in Leviticus 19 that is echoed throughout Scripture, the time is now.

It is my sincere hope as bishop that various harmful actions will be reconsidered. It is my fervent prayer that we, as church together, will be bold in our witness and actions. ELCA churchwide ministries will continue to provide resources to protect the most vulnerable among us.

Let us together join in:

- **A Call to Prayer** alongside and for immigrants and sojourners, our communities and for our leaders, that they will act wisely and justly, protect all people and not cause harm.
- **A Call to Learning**, using resources such as the ELCA social message "Immigration"; the ELCA’s strategy for Accompanying Migrants with Protection, Advocacy, Representation and Opportunities (AMMPARO), including “[Know Your Rights](#)” information; and companion resources from [Global Refuge](#) (formerly Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service) and [Church World Service](#) on the policy changes. Join ELCA AMMPARO and Global Refuge for a webinar, “What Now—Resources for Faith Communities after Executive Orders,” on Thursday, Jan. 30, 4-5 p.m. Eastern time. Registration is required. Register [here](#).
- **A Call to Personal Witness** by speaking out against rhetoric that dehumanizes and demonizes anyone made in the image of God, and by promoting accurate information about neighbors and issues of public concern, in the spirit of the [Conference of Bishops statement](#) on the need to speak the truth.
- **A Call to Public Witness**, using the resources of ELCA AMMPARO, [ELCA Witness in Society](#) and State Public Policy Offices, and joining with our ecumenical partners as we offer faithful, direct witness to government.

As a [sanctuary denomination](#), the ELCA proclaims walking with immigrants as a matter of faithfulness. The ELCA does not call for activity contrary to the law but for congregations, leaders and individuals to explore resources addressing how to interpret this memorial to their own contexts. Most of all, I encourage all to discern together how to live our faith, excluding none from God’s overflowing love.

God calls us to welcome the stranger and love the sojourner as we love ourselves. I pray for God’s grace to increase understanding of and mercy toward immigrants in these days.

In Christ,



The Rev. Elizabeth A. Eaton
Presiding Bishop
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

About the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America:

The ELCA is one of the largest Christian denominations in the United States, with 2.8 million members in more than 8,500 worshipping communities across the 50 states and in the Caribbean region. Known as the church of “God’s work. Our hands.,” the ELCA emphasizes the saving grace of God through faith in Jesus Christ, unity among Christians and service in the world. The ELCA’s roots are in the writings of the German church reformer Martin Luther.

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